

# The Great War of Magic

*Renaissance, Reformation and the Book of the Law*



*Tahuti standeth in His splendor at the prow,  
and Ra-Hoor abideth at the helm.<sup>1</sup>*

In the Palm Sunday of 1484, the city of Rome witnessed the strangest happenings, events that, however, did transpire with an enthusiastic familiarity. Dressed with a bloodstained linen mantle, a crown of thorns and a silver crescent engraved with Hermetic words, the prophet Giovanni da Correggio, self-proclaimed as the Angel of Wisdom, entered the Immortal City to sermonize to the people.

This is my servant Pimander, whom I have chosen. This Pimander is my supreme and waxing child, in whom I am well pleased, to cast out demons, and proclaim my judgment and truth to the heathen. Do not hinder him,

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<sup>1</sup> *Liber Resh*. In *Magick Book Four*, Aleister Crowley. Weiser (2002). *Tahuti* is a variation of the name of the Egyptian god Toth.

but hear and obey him with all fear and veneration; thus speaks the Lord your God and Father or every talisman of all world, Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>2</sup>

All the details of the bizarre procession were carefully planned and executed, according to Biblical and Hermetic symbolism. Giovanni had a reed-staff in his hand and an inkwell hung from his reins. Hiding a white ass in a clear reference to Jesus entrance in Jerusalem, and a basket containing a human skull (probably in memory of John the Baptist), he was heralded by two servants mounted on horses – one carrying a book, the other a sheathed sword. Leaves of paper were distributed to the people on the streets, helping them to identify the prophet:

I, Giovanni Mercurio of Corregio, the Angel of Wisdom Pimander, in the highest and greatest ecstasy of the Spirit of Jesus Christ evangelize loudly unto all this water of the kingdom for the few.<sup>3</sup>

Giovanni was following the ancient tradition of the Biblical prophets who engaged in symbolic actions as a mean to better transmit their messages, as did Oseias who married a prostitute to symbolize the idolatry in which the Chosen People felt. But, as a Hermetic magician, his actions were probably not intended as a mere representation of his message, but as an efficient means to bring the desired changes to happen. When Aleister Crowley in 1937 reunited five representatives of the different races and cultures of Humanity, and delivered to each of them one copy of The Book of the Law at the Cleopatra's Needle on the Embankment of London, he was acting after the same principle<sup>4</sup>. Both men believed that magic was a way to prophecy, and that prophecy and magic could be used to change the world.

Giovanni's choice of Mercury and Pimander as a new prophetic identity was not accidental or fortuitous, but can be seen as the apotheosis of a process begun two decades earlier.

### *The Return of Hermes*

In 1463, one anonymous Macedonian monk rediscovered an important collection of texts, devoted to metaphysics, cosmology, and magic. The writings were long lost to Europe, and belonged to ancient traditions attributed to a complex and polemic figure: *Hermes Trismegistus*. Now, Hermes Trismegistus is a legendary figure, the heir of a little bit confuse genealogy which began with the fusion between the Egyptian god Toth and the Greek god Hermes. He was later humanized as have being a

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<sup>2</sup> Lodovico Lazzarelli, *The Hermetic Writings and Related Documents*, Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn. Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (2005). These were the words engraved in the silver crescent.

<sup>3</sup> Lodovico Lazzarelli, *The Hermetic Writings and Related Documents*, Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn. Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (2005).

<sup>4</sup> *Perdurabo: the Life of Aleister Crowley*, Richard Kaczynski. North Atlantic Books (2010).

prophet who, beside other merits, enjoyed the very special dignity of having received a glimpse of the future Christian revelation. However, after some time he proved to be much more than a dubious reference to the origins and the forerunners of Christianity, as his credentials as a Heathen prophet became important as an apology to whoever would be interested at other areas of knowledge associated with his figure, and amidst these areas magic figured preeminently. The traditions and the authority connected to him were preserved in the Muslim world, and leaked back into Europe through Spain during the XII and the XIII centuries, preparing the fertile ground in which the recovered texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* would be received in the XV century.

Early Arabic accounts tell of an ancient Egyptian sage named Hermes Triplicate-in-Wisdom, the founder of the pagan religion before the great Flood, a lawgiver who ascended to the heavenly spheres of the planets and returned to teach astrology, a true prophet like Jesus and Muhammad. The teachings of this wise Hermes circulated in Arabic translation, having been handed down, as the accounts said, over long ages by the great philosophers of the past, such as Aristotle and Apollonius of Tyana, or after being rediscovered inscribed on tablets in subterranean chambers of Egyptian ruins. The Arabic books of Hermes claim to explain the hidden workings of the universe, the secrets of creation, and the mysteries of nature. They offer means to predict the future from astral omens, instructions for the manufacture of potent talismans, and encrypted directions for manufacturing the elixir of the alchemists.<sup>5</sup>

It is not that Hermes Trismegistus was completely forgotten in Europe: the Hermetic treatise known as *Asclepius* was preserved in the monastic libraries and the Church Fathers were kind enough to mention his name several times. But Hermetic knowledge remained dormant during the first millennium, just to burst into the XV century when the rescued collection of texts found his way to Renaissance Italy. The official discourse of the Christian theology, of course, repudiated any tentative of using the figure of Hermes Trismegistus as a justification for the study and practice of magic, and there was a dissention on the subject which went back to the beginnings of Christian literature. Although Lactantius in the III century defended the veracity and legitimacy of the legend, it was Saint Augustine one century after who determined the Ecclesiastical line to be followed, condemning the idolatry of Hermes Trismegistus in *De Civitate Dei*. That condemnation, however, did not stop the new adepts of the rediscovered Hermetic wisdom to use Lactantius definitions to justify their interests.

Now let us pass to divine testimonies; but I will previously bring forward one which resembles a divine testimony, both on account of its very great antiquity, and because he whom I shall name was taken from men and placed among the gods. According to Cicero, Caius Cotta the pontiff, while disputing against the Stoics concerning superstitions, and the variety of opinions which prevail respecting the gods, in order that he might, after

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<sup>5</sup> *The Arabic Hermes: From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science*, Kevin van Blade. Oxford University Press (2009).

the custom of the Academics, make everything uncertain, says that there were five Mercuries; and having enumerated four in order, says that the fifth was he by whom Argus was slain, and that on this account he fled into Egypt, and gave laws and letters to the Egyptians. The Egyptians call him Thoth; and from him the first month of their year, that is, September, received its name among them. He also built a town, which is even now called in Greek Hermopolis (the town of Mercury), and the inhabitants of Phenae honour him with religious worship. And although he was a man, yet he was of great antiquity, and most fully imbued with every kind of learning, so that the knowledge of many subjects and arts acquired for him the name of Trismegistus. He wrote books, and those in great numbers, relating to the knowledge of divine things, in which he asserts the majesty of the supreme and only God, and makes mention of Him by the same names which we use-God and Father. And that no one might inquire His name, he said that He was without name, and that on account of His very unity He does not require the peculiarity of a name. These are his own words: "God is one, but He who is one only does not need a name; for He who is self-existent is without a name." God, therefore, has no name, because He is alone; nor is there any need of a proper name, except in cases where a multitude of persons requires a distinguishing mark, so that you may designate each person by his own mark and appellation. But God, because He is always one, has no peculiar name.<sup>6</sup>

The recovered collection of hermetic texts was handed to Marsilio Ficino, the first name in the new lineage of Hermetic magicians that would wage the war of magic to fight and resist tyranny, superstition and oppression for six centuries, a lineage from which Aleister Crowley would inherit and to which he would belong wholeheartedly, a lineage made of *magicians and books*. Ficino translated the entire *Corpus Hermeticum*, a series of eighteen tractates from which the first is called *Pimander*. Such is the power of these writings, that in just 21 years a hermetic inspired prophet was taking the names of Mercurius and Pimander and led a magical procession through the streets of the city which was the very heart of Christendom.

The image of Hermes Trismegistus proved to be a very powerful source of inspiration, an image whose origins can be found at the core of the human mind where reason and imagination are born and married. He is god and man, patron of Writing and Magic, forerunner of Science and, at the same time, he is the religious representative of a pantheon which until today haunts and perseveres. Magic and Revelation are essential features of the teachings of this god of double nationality, reinterpreted as Pagan prophet and revered by Muslim and Christians alike, and even capable of making himself to be represented in the Renaissance churches when leading the magical and philosophical revival of the XV century. Inspired by the writings attributed to Hermes, the *magi* of Renaissance did not hesitate in associating once again Magic to Revelation, what in practical terms put the magical experience at the origin of the religions:

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<sup>6</sup> *The Divine Institutes, Book I, Chap. VI*, Lactantius. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07011.htm>

Magic, and the astrological premises that accompanied it, made operational a fully evolved nexus of forms which guaranteed the existence of a sphere in which man's cosmological position took on a new dimension. For if the soul vivified the corporeal world through *spiritus*, and if a *spiritus* of celestial origin was diffused throughout nature, then not only was the soul's process of ascent and descent clarified, but the highest part of the soul was clearly not attached to the corporeal realm. Proof of this was man's ability, under certain conditions, to attain supracosmic levels, to command the elements and to prophesy.<sup>7</sup>

### *Magic and Prophecy*

The association between Magic and Prophecy was already present in Antiquity and was preserved by the Classical authors Cornelius Agrippa consulted. In his *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, for instance, he clearly mentioned this connection between the magical practices and prophecy:

Now the second phrensy proceeds from Dionysus: this doth by expiations exterior, and interior, and by conjurations, by mysteries, by solemnities, rites, temples, and observations divert the soul into the mind, the supreme part of itself, the supreme part of itself, and makes it a fit and pure temple of the gods, in which the divine spirits may dwell, which the soul then possessing as the associate of life, is filled by them with felicity, wisdom, and oracles, not in signs, and marks, or conjectures, but in a certain concitation of the mind, and free motion: so Bacchus did soothsay to the Boeotians, and Epimenides to the people of Cous, and the Sybil Erithea to the Trojans. Sometimes this phrensy happens through a clear vision, sometimes by an express voice: so Socrates was governed by his demon, whose counsel he did diligently obey, whose voice he did often hear of his ears, to whom also the shape of a demon did often appear. Many prophesying spirits also were wont to show themselves, and be associates with the souls of them that were purified; examples of which therein are many in sacred writ, as in Abraham, and his bondmaid Hagar, in Jacob, Gideon, Elias, Tobias, Daniel, and many more.<sup>8</sup>

Some of the main processes of Ceremonial Magical are mentioned in this passage from Agrippa: *expiations, conjurations, mysteries, solemnities, rites, temples, observations...* All this leading to the "diversion of the soul into the supreme part of the

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<sup>7</sup> *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, edited by Charles B. Smith and Quentin Skinner. Cambridge University Press (1992).

<sup>8</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book III, Chapter XLVII), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).

mind” and preparing the magus to become “a fit and pure temple of the gods in which the divine spirits can dwell.” The benefits of the process are great: the soul is filled with felicity and attain prophecy (wisdom and oracles). The list of characters who shared this blessed state is impressive and includes two key persons: Socrates and Abraham. If the foundations of our culture are to be found in the Greek philosophy and in the Jewish religion, we can say then that the daemonic knowledge received through prophecy (by Socrates and Abraham) is ever present in the Western civilization.

Today, having access to the surviving texts from the Greek-Roman magic, we can verify that the association between magic and prophecy was already well established at the beginning of Christianity, the bastard child of Greek and Jewish cultures. It was used to reinterpret key religious figures as, for instance, the Moses of the Jew, who was largely believed to have being a magus. His successor Jesus, considered today by many researchers to have been a magician and itinerant miracle-worker who was deified after death by his followers<sup>9</sup>, is an excellent example of how magic can be the origin of a new religious foundation, what should not surprise us so much, if we pay attention to the common Shamanic sources of *both* religion and magic. Shamanism is at the same time the original religion *and* a complete magical practice, where we already find described all the varieties of religious experiences repeated so many times in the Gospels as in the Grimoires.

What magic and religion initially share, through revelation, is the premise of a contact with one spiritual being, from whom the magus would derive a new knowledge. Although to religion this contact usually belongs only to the founder and remains registered since its origins and are inalterable, to the magician the prophetic experience can become part of his daily reality:

By the efficacy of religion the presence of spirits doth dispose the effect, neither can any work of wonderful efficacy in religion be done, unless some good spirit the ruler and the finisher of the work be there present. [...] Also the divining of suitable things works so with man’s mind, that good spirits do assist us willingly, and communicate their power and virtue to us, daily helping us with illuminations, inspirations, oracles, prophesying, dreams, miracles, prodigies, divinations, and auguries, and working upon and acting upon our spirits, as images like to them, by framing them by their influences, and making them most like to themselves even so far, as that oftentimes our spirit doth as surely work wonderful things as the celestial spirits are wont to do.<sup>10</sup>

We can see the perfect demonstration of the confrontation between the prophetic magus of the Renaissance and the established doctrine in the audience John Dee had with the Polish king Stefan Batory. Dee was moved by his prophetic zeal, after the

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<sup>9</sup> *Jesus The Magician*, Morton Smith. Barnes & Noble (1993).

<sup>10</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book III, Chapter XXXII.), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).

angelic communications he received during his magical ceremonies, to appear before the king with his spiritual messages. The king, however, started the meeting with a statement that the prophetic revelations came to an end after the coming of Jesus Christ, and that the audience could only proceed in accordance to the well-established doctrines of the Church<sup>11</sup>.

The association between magic and religion, through prophecy and revelation, attacked a fundamental theological premise of Medieval Christianity, by which the initiative of revelation rested exclusively in the hands of God. During a long period the theological censure covered much of the knowledge about prophecy which, far from being a happening typical of Judaism and its derivative religions, was a characteristic phenomenon of many of the Mediterranean cultures. The universal character of prophecy is testified by the Bible itself, as in the *Book of Kings* there is mention to the prophets of the Canaanite god Baal. Prophecy was associated to the ecstatic states during which visions and messages were received. In fact, the survival of ecstatic prophets in Israel until the exile to Babylon which was associated, on one side, with the official cults and its temples, and on the other, with the nomadic groups in extinction, has its roots in the most primitive religious forms associated to the Shamanism. The existence of professional prophets exercising their craft inside the norms of the cult and at the temples of Yahweh is mentioned several times in the Old Testament and always connected to *techniques to ecstasy induction*, like the use of incenses, chanting, musical instruments and dance. Of course, these techniques have their origins in the prehistory and were discontinued inside Judaism due to the military catastrophes suffered by the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. The destruction of both kingdoms and the exile to Babylon favored the codification of the texts and the valorization of the literary prophets, whose experiences of revelation were not associated (at least in the surviving texts) with the techniques of ecstasy induction, what was in accordance with a more radical monotheistic view developed during the exile.

However, the theological censorship was not able to completely erase the existent registers about the universality of prophecy and the techniques to induce prophetic ecstasy, and it is again in Agrippa's masterpiece that we find them abundantly, frequently mentioned together with elements of ceremonial magic, which for Agrippa became the universal discipline which gathers inside its corpus all the specific techniques. I will make a point here of quoting these passages abundantly, because Agrippa's book was *the* fundamental source and influence for the next generation of magicians of the Renaissance, the ones who would play a far more active role in the war of magic. In the following excerpts, we find the apologies for magic, its connection to prophesy, and several mentions about manifold means and techniques to achieve prophecy through magic, inherited from the ancients:

I do not doubt but the Title of our book of Occult Philosophy, or of Magic, may by the rarity of it allure many to read it, amongst which, some of a crazy judgment, and some that are perverse will come to hear what I can

say, who, by their rash ignorance may take the name of magic in the worse sense, and though scarce having seen the title, cry out that I teach forbidden arts, sow the seed of heresies, offend pious ears, and scandalize excellent wits; that I am a sorcerer, and superstitious and devilish, who indeed am a magician. To whom I answer, that a magician doth not amongst learned men signify a sorcerer, or one that is superstitious or devilish; but a wise man, a priest, a prophet; and that the sibyls were magicianesses, and therefore prophesied most clearly of Christ; and that magicians, as wise men, by the wonderful secrets of the world, knew Christ the author of the world to be born, and came first of all to worship him; and that the name of magic was received by philosophers, commended by divines, and not unacceptable to the Gospel.<sup>12</sup>

Also it is well known that *Pythagoras*, and *Plato* went to the prophets of Memphis to learn it, and travelled through almost all Syria, Egypt, Judea, and the schools of the Chaldeans, that they might not be ignorant of the most sacred memorials, and records of magic, as also that they might be furnished with divine things.<sup>13</sup>

So also peony, sallendine, balm, ginger, gentian, dittany, and vervain, which is of use in prophesying, and expiations, as also driving away evil spirits.<sup>14</sup>

So we read that the ancients were wont often to receive some divine, and wonderful thing by certain natural things: so the stone that is bred in the apple of the eye of a civet cat, held under the tongue of a man, is said to make him to divine, or prophesy.<sup>15</sup>

Also there is a herb called rheangelida, which magicians drinking of, can prophesy.<sup>16</sup>

Wherefore suffumigations are wont to be used by them that are about to soothsay, for to affect their fancy, which indeed being appropriated to any certain deities, do fit us to receive divine inspiration: so they say that fumes made with linseed, and fleabane seed, and roots of violets, and

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<sup>12</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book I, Preface to the Reader), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).

<sup>13</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book I, Chapter II), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).

<sup>14</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book I, Chapter XXIII), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).

<sup>15</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book I, Chapter XXXVIII), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).

<sup>16</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book I, Chapter XXXVIII), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).



parsley, doth make one to foresee things to come, and doth conduce to prophesying.<sup>17</sup>

I being bound to you by the band of these your great virtues am so far a debtor as to communicate without envy by the true account of all opinions, those mysteries of divine and ceremonial magic which I have truly learned, and not to hide the knowledge of those things, whatsoever concerning these matters the those old priests of the Egyptians, and Chaldeans, the ancient prophets of the Babylonians, the Cabalists, the divine magicians of the Hebrews, also the Orpheans, Pythagoreans and Platonists the profoundest Philosophers of Greece, further what the Bragmanni of the Indians, the Gymnosophists of Ethiopia, and the uncorrupted theologians of our religion have delivered, and by what force of words, power of seals, by what charms of benedictions and imprecations, and by what virtue of observations they in old times wrought so stupendous and wonderful prodigies, intimating to you in this third book of Occult Philosophy and exposing to the light those things which have been buried in the dust of antiquity and involved in the obscurity of oblivion, as in Cymmerian darkness even to this day.<sup>18</sup>

Also the divining of suitable things works so with man's mind, that good spirits do assist us willingly, and communicate their power and virtue to us, daily helping us with illuminations, inspirations, oracles, prophesyings, dreams, miracles, prodigies, divinations, and auguries, and working upon and acting upon our spirits, as images like to them, by framing them by their influences, and making them most like to themselves even so far, as that oftentimes our spirit doth as surely work wonderful things as the celestial spirits are wont to do.<sup>19</sup>

So we read in the books of the Senates in the chapter of *Eleazar*, that *Rabbi Israel* made certain cakes, writ upon with certain divine and angelical names, and so consecrated, which they that did eat with faith, hope, and charity, did presently break forth with a spirit of prophecy.<sup>20</sup>

The ideas listed in the work of Agrippa would exert a very powerful influence and receive a revolutionary practical treatment by the Renaissance magi who would come after him, Giordano Bruno, Tommaso Campanella and John Dee – all of them readers of Agrippa. Even Paracelsus, who rejected the theories of Agrippa, in close

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<sup>17</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book I, Chapter XLIII), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).

<sup>18</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book III, Dedication to Hermannus of Wyda), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).

<sup>19</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book III, Chapter XXXII), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).

<sup>20</sup> *The Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Book III, Chapter XLVIII), Agrippa of Nettesheim. Translated by James Freake, edited and annotated by Donald Tyson. Llewellyn (2005).

analyses seem to debt a lot to him. We can say that beginning with the work of Marsilio Ficino and achieving its apex with the *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, Renaissance magic defined itself in its aims and methods, but these aims and methods were until then viewed as an initiatory path of relevance only for the individual magician. After this initial period, the magi would not be concerned only in justifying their path against the condemnations of the Church, but they would escalate the war of magic by using their knowledge in search for a power capable of changing the world.

### *The Magi of the Renaissance*

Giordano Bruno had travelled through Europe divulging the bases of a new religious movement, based on “Egyptian” ideas derived from the Hermetism. This movement depended on the access, that only a magus could achieve, to the intermediary sphere between the natural-human world and the divine one, which allegorical-symbolic nature demanded an exegesis available but to a few. The prophet, according to Bruno though, would reach the intermediary sphere through a transcendent use of the Art of Memory, of which Bruno considered himself to be a master. The result should be the reception of a revelation that would permit to reverse the crisis and decadence of Europe, which Bruno believed to have its origins in the degeneration of the original Hermetic religion that happened inside Christianity:

The political and religious crisis troubling Europe is thus no casual event, according to Bruno, but has deep theological roots and was born from none other than the reversal of values produced by Christianity, which put civil virtues in second place and exalted as supreme values humility, ignorance, and the passive obedience to the divine law. According to Bruno’s interpretation, the seeds of decay introduced by Christian preaching culminated in Luther’s Reformation, which represents the “evil angel” foreseen in the ancient Hermetic prophecy.<sup>21</sup>

The result of the prophetic contact achieved by the magus would be the determination of a legislation which, instead of aiming at the greater glory of the divine, instead had its goal in the increase of the well-being and of the civic splendor of man.<sup>22</sup> In the writings of Bruno, Hermes Trismegistus reappears as the representative of a magical revelation with clearly reformist aims:

And the dialogue in the *De umbris idearum* makes it quite clear that the instructor of Philothimus—and therefore of Filoteo or Teofilo, of the Nolan, of Giordano Bruno - is Hermes Trismegistus. It is Hermes who hands the book with the new philosophy and the new art in it to Philothimus; and this is the book on the *Shadows of Ideas* by Giordano Bruno, which is, in fact, written by Hermes - that

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<sup>21</sup> *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff.. Brill (2006).

<sup>22</sup> *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, edited by Charles B. Smith and Quentin Skinner. Cambridge University Press (1992).

is to say it is a book about magic, about a very strong solar magic. The allusion to the Lament in the Asclepius, describing how the magical religion of the Egyptians came in late, bad times, to be forbidden by legal statutes, relates this new Hermetic revelation vouchsafed to Giordano Bruno to the Egyptian religion, the religion of the intellect, or of the mind, reached beyond the worship of the visible sun. Those who forbade that religion by law, were, in the Augustinian interpretation of the Lament, the Christians, whose purer religion superseded that of the Egyptians. But, according to Bruno, the false Christian "Mercuries" have suppressed the better Egyptian religion - an anti-Christian interpretation of Hermetism of which much more evidence will be adduced from Bruno's works later on.<sup>23</sup>

It is important to note the strong similarities between the program of Aleister Crowley, developed three hundred years later, and Bruno's. Both were magi bearers of a revelation, obtained through magical practices, of a Hermetic-solar character and destined to reform and regenerate the society of men.

The great problem the view by which prophecy is the result of the most elevated form of magic presented to the official representatives of the European religion, both Catholic and Protestant, was exactly the fact that it put the initiative of obtaining a revelation in the hands of the magi. That carried three great threats:

- a. It attacked the official theological premises, to which prophecy and revelation depended exclusively on the divine initiative.
- b. It made impossible to the ecclesiastical authority to censor a message supposedly of divine origin.
- c. The prophetic messages of some of the great magi of the Renaissance, like Paracelsus, Bruno, Campanella and Dee, had a clearly heterodox and reformist character.

I pretend to quote large excerpts from the excellent work by Robin Bruce Barnes<sup>24</sup> about the apocalyptic influences of the Reformation, because they are directly related to the magical efforts we are analyzing here; so I begin with an excerpt that goes right to heart of the matter:

Not all Magic rested on explicit neo-Platonic foundations, but virtually all was associated with some form of mysticism. In other words, magic assumed that knowledge could be gained by direct insight into divine reality. Hence the focus of freedom and transforming power tended to shift away from God to the human mind. This shift of focus above all made

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<sup>23</sup> *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Frances A. Yates. Routledge and Kegan Paul (1964).

<sup>24</sup> *Prophecy and Gnosis, Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation*, Robin Bruce Barnes. Stanford University Press (1988).

magical practitioners like Paracelsus, as well as contemplatives like Valentin Weigel and Jacob Boehme, heretical in the eyes of the orthodoxy. But we should neither overestimate how far sixteenth-century magic rejected Christian doctrines, nor underestimate how far genuine Lutheran piety could bend in the direction of mystical speculation.<sup>25</sup>

The Protestant inclination toward mystical speculation and prophecy, according to Barnes' supposition, can partially explain the happy sojourn Giordano Bruno enjoyed in the cities of Wittenberg and Helmstedt between 1588 and 1590. Before anything else, Bruno's longings for a Hermetic reform of religion certainly were to some degree in agreement with the reformist yearnings initially manifested by Luther. The longing for changes was one of the leitmotifs of the period, and it resurfaces again in the XX century in the radical reform proposed by Aleister Crowley, which does not only reiterated the ideals of the Renaissance magic, but owe much to the Lutheran ideas, ideas like the universality of the priesthood between all Christians and the need of a direct contact both to the Bible as to God. We see the repetition of these ideas, for instance, when Crowley insists that "all questions of the Law are to be decided only by appeal to my writings, each for himself."<sup>26</sup> In the midst of the great dispute of ideas and principles which reigned in Europe between the theologians, a dispute which was taken to the streets and which moved armies, the appeal both to a wisdom validated by time as to a direct access to the divine source of that wisdom fulgurated as a transcendent solution, and who but the magus could revendicate the access to both?

Like most of the German universities at this time, Wittenberg subscribed quite fully to the revival of antiquity. Belief in the superiority of ancient wisdom was well-nigh universal. In one sense, the Renaissance notion of an ancient wisdom was at odds with the confessional understanding of truth held by devoted Lutherans. The ancient wisdom was so highly valued by Renaissance seekers partly because it was obscure, and it was obscure because it seemed a core of divine knowledge that lay behind and united all religious and philosophical doctrines. The underlying implication that all creeds should be tolerated could not have been more foreign to Lutheran confessionalism. Yet the notion of ancient wisdom could also be interpreted in a properly Lutheran sense. All that was necessary was to insist that a certain doctrinal insight was not merely another outer wrapping of the deeper truth, but an essential, or even the essential, piece of that truth. Precisely this view allowed partisans of Luther's Reformation to be, at the same time, avid pursuers of ancient or hidden knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Prophecy and Gnosis, Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation*, Robin Bruce Barnes. Stanford University Press (1988).

<sup>26</sup> *The Book of the Law*, Aleister Crowley. Red Wheel (2011).

<sup>27</sup> *Prophecy and Gnosis, Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation*, Robin Bruce Barnes. Stanford University Press (1988).

In the search for further learning at the fount of ancient wisdom, the Renaissance magus, who claimed to be reviving and carrying on this very tradition, could become a highly admired figure. Among those Lutherans for whom the search for prophetic insight was central, a magus like Bruno could represent the hope of prophetic clarity despite the profound unorthodoxy of his thought.<sup>28</sup>

We can see in these excerpts the subterranean fight of the Hermetic wisdom and magic, in its tentative of creating an ambience of tolerance and respect where they could manifest in plenitude. It was, and it still is, a conflict that happens principally inside the human minds, a confrontation between the magical creativity inherent to *every* human being and the superstitious impositions forced by tyranny through ideological oppression. The magi are essentially adherents of a free society where individuality is respected because it is only in this kind of society where they can prosper in their longings, and so they amongst the ones who feel more acutely the oppression. The appeal to the figure of Hermes Trismegistus, and its defense, made part of an intellectual strategy which aimed to make magic socially acceptable and, because of that, the Renaissance magi elaborated apologies based upon a division of their theoretical field: definitions of a natural and a spiritual magic were defended in opposition to the forms considered more dangerous or religiously unacceptable.

The transition from the medieval period to the Renaissance in Christian Europe was accompanied by a reevaluation of the status of Magic in some intellectual circles. The appearance of ancient bodies of literature, Neoplatonic and Hermetic, in Latin and Italian translations, together with the rendering of significant corpus of Kabbalistic literature into Latin and Italian, precipitated the emergence of a new attitude toward magic, first in the circles of the Florentine literati, and afterward, under their influence, in a long series of European Renaissance and post-Renaissance figures all over Europe. This positive reevaluation of magic was not a simple change from medieval times. Renaissance figures remained reticent, if not manifestly negative, to the popular medieval types of magic. For them, magic was the lore taught by ancient masters like Hermes Trismegistus or Jamblicus, which did not envisage a pragmatic way to solve material problems by appeal to supernal or infernal powers. Rather, it was lore based on a vast knowledge of the universal order, a knowledge that culminated in actualizing the potentiality inherent in human nature. Instead of being the practice of obscure and peripheral persons, the Renaissance magician came to designate the apex of human achievement, to be cultivated by the elite in order to exercise the human qualities that

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<sup>28</sup> *Prophecy and Gnosis, Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation*, Robin Bruce Barnes. Stanford University Press (1988).

testify to the fullness of human perfection. It was not so much the subjugation of the material world to which the learned magicians of the Renaissance aspired, as to the fulfillment of their spirit.<sup>29</sup>

### *The Way of the Magus*

The magus is someone who foresees the possibilities of illumination and transcendence, it is as if a glimpse or pre-enjoyment of the magical possibilities were intuited by him or her, and he (or she) perceive in the symbols and ceremonies of magic the keys to that experience. I know it, because it is what happened to me. I always had in my younger years the feeling that, somewhere, certain knowledge and certain techniques should exist. And they did. I found them in the Trumps of the Tarot, in the Tree of Life and in the Lesser Ritual of the Pentagram, and when I found them I was sure that they were what I was expecting for. Now, readers used to that kind of stereotype must be quickly waiting for me to insinuate some past life, and will be maybe disappointed to know that I do not give too much credit to this kind of explanation. And I do not even think it is necessary, the explanation can be much simpler: *I have a brain*. What do I mean with this? Independently of any objective reality which takes (or not) part in the magical phenomenon, the magical phenomenon must be necessarily processed in our brains – or else we would not even be able to remember it. That means that “to foresee the possibilities of illumination and transcendence as an intuited glimpse or pre-enjoyment” is simply *to feel* that certain areas of our brain where these experiences can happen exist and can be stimulated, and when we come in touch with magical symbols and we imagine ourselves enacting ceremonies, these areas of our brains begin to be affected, and we have the sensation of recognition. That does not look so extraordinary if we remember the presentiment and the pre-enjoyment we felt in our teen years about love and sex – we could feel and thrill foreseeing the future actual enjoyment of these experiences.

So, returning to our magical war, we have the Renaissance magus striving to achieve his metaphysical goals, but at the same time he lacks the security and the peace of mind that exists only in a free and stable society. If he wants to persist, and if he wants that others *after* him carry on the knowledge - and the Hermetic magician, being a learned man values the preservation of the books he so eagerly looked for as much as the transmission of the knowledge they contain – he must *act* in the world he lives, and the action of the magi at that time fell on one of the following lines:

- To make apology for Magic as useful Natural Magic, or as Ceremonial Magic devoted exclusively to pious contacts and results.
- To use Magic as a prophetic tool to have influence in the present situation.

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<sup>29</sup> *Jewish Magic from the Renaissance Period to the Early Hasidism*, Moshe Idel. In *Religion, Science, and Magic, in Concert and in Conflict*, edited by Jacob Neusner. Oxford University Press (1989).

- To use Magic to *bring* the transformations he desires to see in the world.

In the first line, we have magi like Ficino and Agrippa. Ficino endeavored to remain in good terms with the Church, and being under the protection of the Medici certainly helped him to achieve this. Ficino practiced a benign kind of astrological magic aimed at therapeutic results, but his translations and writings, both on philosophy as in magic, became the foundation of everything that came after. His famous apology for magic circulated through all Europe, and set the tone for all similar endeavors.

After this, you too rise, O mighty Guicciardini, and reply to intellectual busy-bodies that Marsilio is not approving magic and images but recounting them in the course of an interpretation of Plotinus. And my writings make this quite clear, if they are read impartially. Nor do I affirm here a single word about profane magic which depends upon the worship of daemons, but I mention natural magic, which, by natural things, seeks to obtain the services of the celestials for the prosperous health of our bodies. This power, it seems, must be granted to minds which use it legitimately, as medicine and agriculture are justly granted, and all the more so as that activity which joins heavenly things to earthly is more perfect. From this workshop, the Magi, the first of all, adored the new-born Christ. Why then are you so dreadfully afraid of the name of Magus, a name pleasing to the Gospel, which signifies not an enchanter and a sorcerer, but a wise priest? For what does that Magus, the first adorer of Christ, profess? If you wish to hear: on the analogy of a farmer, he is a cultivator of the world. Nor does he on that account worship the world, just as a farmer does not worship the earth; but just as a farmer for the sake of human sustenance tempers his field to the air, so that wise man, that priest, for the sake of human welfare tempers the lower parts of the world to the upper parts; and just like hen's eggs, so he fittingly subjects earthly things to heaven that they may be fostered. God himself always brings this about and by doing, teaches and urges us to do it in order that the lowest things may be produced, moved, and ruled by the higher. Lastly, there are two kinds of magic. The first is practiced by those who unite themselves to daemons by a specific religious rite, and, relying on their help, often contrive portents. This, however, was thoroughly rejected when the Prince of this World was cast out. But the other kind of magic is practiced by those who seasonably subject natural materials to natural causes to be formed in a wondrous way. Of this profession there are also two types: the first is inquisitive, the second, necessary. The former does indeed feign useless portents for ostentation: as when the Magi of Persia produced a bird similar to a blackbird with a serpent's tail out of sage which had putrefied under manure, while the Sun and Moon occupied the same degree in the second face of Leo; they reduced the bird to ashes and poured it into a lamp, whereupon the house seemed as a result to be full of serpents. This type, however, must be avoided as vain and harmful to health. Nevertheless the necessary type which joins medicine with astrology must be kept. If anyone obstinately insists further, however, gratify him, Guicciardini, to the extent that the man (if one wholly undeserving of such a benefit is a man) may never read these things of ours, nor understand, remember, or

make use of them. There are many points besides which your own genius will be able to bring forward to oppose ungrateful ignorance.<sup>30</sup>

The strategy of trying to whitewash magic did not started in the Renaissance, however. As we can see from an excerpt from Saint Augustine, the practice goes back at least to the IV century. As Augustine works were widely known in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the magi were conscious about how easily their argument could be contradicted.

These miracles, and many others of the same nature, which it were tedious to mention, were wrought for the purpose of commending the worship of the one true God, and prohibiting the worship of a multitude of false gods. Moreover, they were wrought by simple faith and godly confidence, not by the incantations and charms composed under the influence of a criminal tampering with the unseen world, of an art which they call either magic, or by the more abominable title goetia, or the more honorable designation theurgy; for they wish to discriminate between those whom the people call magicians, who practise goetia, and are addicted to illicit arts and condemned, and those others who seem to them to be worthy of praise for their practice of theurgy, - the truth, however, being that both classes are the slaves of the deceitful rites of the demons whom they invoke under the names of angels.<sup>31</sup>

Agrippa displayed a contradictory allegiance to magic, denying being a practitioner of the art and denouncing magic as a folly of his younger years when he finally published the definitive version of his *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, but the fact is that he went to great lengths to publish it, and through all his life cultivated a net of adherents all over Europe. That was another effective tactic in the war of magic, as it allowed books and people to circulate in more safe conditions.

He [Agrippa] studied in Cologne from 1499 to 1502, when he received the degree of *magister artium*, and later in Paris. During his studies in the latter city, Agrippa seems to have taken part in a secret circle or self-help society, the members of which were interested in studying *res arcanae*, and with whom he tried to remain in contact in later years.<sup>32</sup>

The apologetic approaches are well summarized in another two passages of Robin Bruce Barns excellent book:

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<sup>30</sup> *Three Books on Life*, Marsilio Ficino. A Critical Edition and Translation with Introduction and Notes by Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark. Medieval & Renaissance Texts and Studies (1998).

<sup>31</sup> *The City of God*, Saint Augustine. Edited by Philip Schaff (1819-1893). Christian Classics Ethereal Library.

<sup>32</sup> *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff.. Brill (2006).



On the other hand, the magical seeker knew that he could never simply take flight from the repugnant world of appearances. His role was primarily to alter the sensibilities through the communication of superior understanding. He was, indeed, a kind of preacher of prophetic truth.<sup>33</sup>

The common denominator of the apocalyptic and magical world-views was the assumption of underlying universal purpose. For the magical outlook as well as for apocalyptic faith, this purpose was God's. As in the study of history and astrology, the ultimate justification for inquiry into nature was that it helped to show this purpose, and therefore to glorify the works of God. For this reason the magician was generally at great pains to show that he was concerned with spiritual, not demonic magic. The distinction was extremely important, because it confirmed that the magician was on the side of faith.<sup>34</sup>

In the second and third lines of action, we have as the best example John Dee and his apocalyptic conversations with the Enochian angels, a long enterprise of five years full of revelations and prophecies, which Dee dared to deliver to the Holy Roman Emperor himself. Dee's ceremonies represent the apex of the Renaissance Magic and were also supposed to be the mean for a dramatic change in the world to happen, and its results survived in a strange way to usher a new chapter in the war of magic, three centuries later.

Of course, magic could be used in a smaller scale to affect kings and princes, or to raise storms to sink armadas (as Dee is believed to have done). But the best of the magi were concerned to use it in a larger scale, to change the entire world, as the truth behind the legends about the Rabbi Joseph della Reina may indicate. Again, magic and revelation seemed to walk hand in hand:

Rabbi Joseph della Reina and the anonymous author of the voluminous *Sepher ha-Meshi* [Book of the Responding Entity], were committing to writing a long array of magical practices, some of them being put into practice by the same authors. I want to emphasize the fact that these magical practices were performed by at least one of these authors, and it is reasonable to assume that this also was the case for Rabbi Joseph della Reina, who presented them as divine, and sometimes angelic, revelations, and therefore as a manifestly positive form of activity. Indeed these magical practices include rites to compel the divine and the angelic world to answer the request of the Kabbalists regarding theoretical and practical

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<sup>33</sup> *Prophecy and Gnosis, Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation*, Robin Bruce Barnes. Stanford University Press (1988).

<sup>34</sup> *Prophecy and Gnosis, Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation*, Robin Bruce Barnes. Stanford University Press (1988).

issues. There are several incantations intended to summon the leaders of the demonic world to descend and reveal secrets concerning practical issues, such as the secret of the preparation of gold and silver.<sup>35</sup>

According to the legend, the Rabbi Joseph della Reina tried to put his magical knowledge to practical use attempting what nowadays goes by the expression “immanentize the eschaton”.

According to the earliest version of a legend, in the 1470s the notorious Rabbi Joseph della Reina performed his famous messianic and magical attempt to invoke the leaders of the demonic world in order to overcome them and allow thereby the advent of the messianic era. I should like to describe briefly this legendary event, a highly influential one, which served, as I shall try to demonstrate in the following discussion, as a blueprint for a series of similar attempts of a messianic-magical nature.<sup>36</sup>

Della Reina together with his ten disciples tried to invoke and constrain the demons *Samael* and *Ammon of No*, the chiefs of the forces of the *Sitra Ahara*, the demonic side of Creation. They failed. But they set the example for similar practices to be done in the future.

Now, it seems to me that the use of magic to achieve broader aims, like the coming of the Messiah or the ushering of a New Age, is a new step on the History of Magic, and it came to happen on the very specific cultural environment of the Reformation. Giordano Bruno was moved by the ideal of a magical reform of religion, and Dee was committed to the angels’ agenda for the coming New Age. Crowley, in the sequence, not just inherits the ideals and goals of the Renaissance magi; he definitively embarks in a reformist program guided by the New Aeon ideals.

Insofar as the magician was attempting to understand and control the forces of the natural world, he clearly sought a kind of power. This feature of his enterprise is easily misunderstood by the modern observer. The larger magical striving was essentially contemplative and speculative; the power it envisioned came from deep faith and the gift of insight, and carried with it a profound spiritual responsibility. In Lutheran Germany, where eschatological hope emphasized faith, intuitive insight, and careful observation, magic tended to have particularly strong spiritual overtones. It also took on the tension and the future-directed hope characteristic of Lutheranism. The power to which it looked was above all the power for an inner transformation that would be reflected in the phenomenal world. The intuitive approach to knowledge that supported the Lutheran interpretation

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<sup>35</sup> *Jewish Magic from the Renaissance Period to the Early Hasidism*, Moshe Idel. In *Religion, Science, and Magic, in Concert and in Conflict*, edited by Jacob Neusner. Oxford University Press (1989).

<sup>36</sup> *Jewish Magic from the Renaissance Period to the Early Hasidism*, Moshe Idel. In *Religion, Science, and Magic, in Concert and in Conflict*, edited by Jacob Neusner. Oxford University Press (1989).

of prophecy was thus twisted to encourage more radical strivings after prophetic truth.<sup>37</sup>

Propaganda proved with time to be the best weapon for the magi –as the efficiency of real magical tactics has very elusive means of confirmation until today. That is why the figure of Hermes Trismegistus was so important. But Hermes was not the only icon the magi could use. In the excerpt of Ficino quoted above, and also in one of the quotes from Agrippa, we see the Three Magi mentioned in the Bible being appropriated for the cause. The Three Magi represented in a way an even better marketing image, as it came from the Bible itself and should, in a way or other, be accounted for in some positive view. Paracelsus, for instance, another great magus with prophetic ambitions, used the Three Magi abundantly in his writings.

Paracelsus followed Albertus Magnus in identifying the three kings or magi from the Orient, who had found the Christ child with the aid of the stars, as ideal references for the vindication of magic. Paracelsus repeatedly commented on this passage from the Gospel of St. Matthew. The model of the three kings gave him the opportunity to define a magus as someone who interprets the prophets and performs miracles in front of the people, and foretells events by the help of spirits or the stars. Only a prophet (in later years Paracelsus would prefer to speak of a “divine magician”) can accomplish more: he speaks and acts by direct divine assistance and inspiration, as seen in the case of Moses, who opposed the Egyptian sorcerers. Paracelsus thought that the three magi were also proficient in medicine, commenting that their gifts were of direct medicinal use. Frankincense helped to protect mother and child from “flying ghosts”, and myrrh, by way of the mother’s milk, freed the baby from threatening worms. This kind of interrelation of medicine, philosophy, astronomy and magic was quite commonplace in the Middle Ages, as can be seen in Peter of Abano. In his later years, Paracelsus interpreted magic as the art of drawing down the powers of the stars, which he considered proxies of celestial ideas, and to make them work for man. Unsurprisingly, he used the term “astronomy” as a synonym for, or even saw it as superior to magic.<sup>38</sup>

Paracelsus did not regard characters as the spells of medieval magic. In his view, magical words and phrases embodied the very language of angels and spirits, who in turn had received their powers from God. This subjection to heavenly forces signified a strong vindication of magic to Paracelsus. The magician was allowed to perform his art as long as he was strictly adhering to the good. Consequently, characters were the only way to retrieve the heavenly powers. Like the physician administering herbs to heal a patient, the magician attained his goal with the aid of characters. Regarding theories of magic, this represents an important shift from the medieval idea of a demoniac influence to that of an impersonal and quasi-natural agent, and

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<sup>37</sup> *Prophecy and Gnosis, Apocalypticism in the Wake of the Lutheran Reformation*, Robin Bruce Barnes. Stanford University Press (1988).

<sup>38</sup> *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff.. Brill (2006).

thus can be considered as an attempt to establish natural magic on a scientific basis.<sup>39</sup>

Paracelsus fall in the first category (*apology for magic as useful natural magic or as ceremonial magic devoted exclusively to pious contacts and results*) when it comes to his apologies for magic, but he also included himself in the list of the magi who sought after revealed knowledge:

At the end of his life, Paracelsus attempted to summarize his teachings and describe its key points as clearly as possible. Thus in his *Labyrinthus medicorum errantium* (Labyrinth of Erring Physicians, 1537/38) he once again set forth the foundations of his medicine. As in the earlier *Paragranum*, he emphasized the importance of understanding nature, the firmament and alchemy, but this time he also philosophized about the process of attaining knowledge. He spoke about experience, science, and the role of magic. The medical art should not be grounded in mere speculation, but in a certain revelation; then it would be a “magica inventrix” that revealed to the physician all he needed to know. Thus Paracelsus advocated a scientific method that included intuition as a legitimate way of attaining knowledge.<sup>40</sup>

Even more, Paracelsus believed his status as magus put him in a special place concerning the end of times and the prophecies of the New Age:

On account of the relevance of the fig tree passage, Paracelsus located for himself a modest but distinctive part in the apocalyptic drama. First, his new system of medicine was purpose-made for the massive challenges that would arise amid the ruins of the apocalyptic age. Through his efforts, first aid would be available to believers awaiting the return of the Messiah. Secondly, as astronomer and magus, he was among the small elite of experts in a position to monitor and interpret the portentous signs and messages from angelic beings that God provided in such special situations. The interpretation of these signs, about which Christ himself had spoken, was intended to bring relief to believers, because they conveyed assurance that the damned were about to receive their just reckoning. The only persons who would be privileged to understand these portents, or ‘celestial meteorology’, were drawn from the thin ranks of the redeemed and, among this group, were those only with special knowledge granted by God.<sup>41</sup>

Aleister Crowley would also find a place for him in the apocalyptic drama, although much less modest than Paracelsus, as he identified himself with the very Beast of the *Book of Revelations*. Paracelsus, as part of his prophetic and preaching endeavors,

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<sup>39</sup> *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff.. Brill (2006).

<sup>40</sup> *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff.. Brill (2006).

<sup>41</sup> *Paracelsus, Medicine, Magic and Mission at the End of Time*, Charles Webster. Yale University Press (2008).

introduced to the cause another wonderful iconic figure, which enjoyed great acceptance amongst his followers: *Elias Artista*.

In Judaism, Elijah precedes the Messiah; by analogy John the Baptist became associated with Elijah in the Christian tradition. The figure of Elijah or Elias thus carried clear messianic overtones, and Paracelsus embroidered on his reputation, describing ‘Elias Artista’ as the harbinger of an imminent ‘golden world’, ushering in a social utopia. [...] Some expected the arrival of a person; others regarded Elias Artista as the symbol of a golden age in which science would reach its summit.<sup>42</sup>

Paracelsus exerted a very strong influence after his death, partially confirming his belief in the importance of his own mission. Not only in Medicine, but also in Theology his writings attracted many devoted followers. And his name was greatly honored being the only thinker explicitly cited in the most efficacious piece of propaganda ever created in the war of magic, the Rosicrucian Manifestos.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the *Fama Fraternitatis* mentions the name of Paracelsus with respect and admiration, nor that it depicts works relating to this author as being present in the vault where the body of Christian Rosenkreuz rests. The founder of the Rosicrucians, as explained in the *Fama*, is supposed to have died in 1484, and his mausoleum not discovered until 1604, whereas Paracelsus was born in 1493 and died in 1541. The implausible chronology only goes to underline paradoxically the relationship of ideas between the Rosicrucians and Paracelsus. The latter’s ideas about the *Astrum*, the world-soul which manifests through the macrocosm; on the *Liber Mundi* (Book of the World) whose hieroglyphs are there to be deciphered; on the invisible half of the cosmos whose secrets man is able to discover because he is the microcosm and the temple of God; on the notion of cosmic time in which the alchemist may intervene as midwife to nature and co-operator with God; on the capacity of the human soul to command the stars, to control events, and even to produce new beings that the *Anima Mundi* “imagines”; and finally his belief in “elementary” beings, i.e., those that live in the elements, the ‘nymphs, sylphs, pygmies, salamanders, and other spirits’: all these ideas of Paracelsus recur in the *Fama Fraternitatis*. His rich and powerful writings, which were not really accessible until Huser’s edition appeared in Basel in 1591, have every appearance of proclaiming him a prophet of the new era.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Championing Basilius Valentinus and expecting Elias Artista: Theodor Kerckring’s commentary on *Currus triumphalis antimonii*. Publicação on-line da bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica J. R. Ritman.

<sup>43</sup> *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, edited by Wouter J. Hanegraaff.. Brill (2006).

*Magic achieves an important victory by being despised*

What happened after the end of the seventeenth century is generally described as the victory of science over magic; magic slumbered in the corners of our culture until the ends of the nineteenth century, betrayed by his younger sister Science:

Natural magic: demonic magic. The two branches of *magia* had parallel intellectual histories – they were jointly allowed for in the scholastic scheme of knowledge, rose together to a position of prominence in the sixteenth – and seventeenth – century natural philosophical debates, and ceased to be taken seriously (or were resolved into other disciplines) when the changes in scientific and theological taste made them both seem equally implausible.<sup>44</sup>

This is however a partial description, because the period is marked by a growing popularization of magic, attested by the printing of grimoires by the thousands. Magic in fact is not anymore the interest of the great minds of the time like during the Renaissance but, again, the period shows the great importance of the *books* in the overall strategy in the great war of magic. And this new and more popular wave of magical literature profited from the fact that science discredit magic, what lead to the discredit of the religious accusations against it. Also the separation between religious and temporal powers in Europe broke the yoke religion so far had over the freedom of the individuals, and magic begin to thrive again freed of the need of apologize for itself.

We saw how the Hermetic books were important to restart the magical war. Magic had being persecuted for a long time before the Middle Ages, and the roots of the persecution are to be found in the two pillars of the European culture, as both in Rome as in Israel we find legislations and injunctions against the practice. One important measure carefully attended by the enemies of magic was obviously the hunt and destruction of the books.

We know from literary sources that a large number of magical books in which spells were collected existed in antiquity. Most of them, however, have disappeared as the result of systematic suppression and destruction. The episode about the burning of the magical books in Ephesus in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 19:19) is well known and typical of many such instances. According to Suetonius, Augustus ordered 2,000 magical scrolls to be burned in the year 13 B.C.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, the first centuries of the Christian era saw many burnings of books, often magical books, and not a few burnings that included the magicians themselves. As a result of these acts of suppression, the magicians and their literature went underground.

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<sup>44</sup> *Thinking with demons, the idea of witchcraft in early modern Europe*, Stuart Clark. Oxford University Press (2005)

<sup>45</sup> It is important to notice that this destruction happened *before* the Christian era.

The papyri themselves testify to this by the constantly recurring admonition to keep the books secret. Yet the the systematic destruction of the magical literature over a long period of time resulted in the disappearance of most of the original texts by the end of the antiquity.<sup>46</sup>

I almost cry every time I read this passage above. The war against magic concentrate fiercely on its books because they are a very efficient weapon, being of immediate use as well as turning into sleeping bombs that can detonate again and again with intervals of centuries sometimes. Theologians and witch hunters of the Reformation were always afraid of tomes like the *Picatrix*, this subversive encyclopedia of magical lore who breached the European confinement to contaminate the best minds with Arabic wizardry.

But none grimoire exemplify better the war of magic as the *Liber Juratus*, or the *Sworn Book of Honorius*. Already mentioned in the XIII century, this grimoire has the notable characteristic of denouncing in a clear and straightforward way the conflict between magic and the Church, reverting in an ingenious and ironic form the ecclesiastical discourse. The writer or writers of this work appropriated the great figure of the Catholic marketing, the Devil, and used him against the Vatican hierarchy itself. They pointed that the persecution against magic is the result of diabolical influence, and at the same time highlighted the holiness inherent to the practice of their art. The insinuation is that the “bishops and prelates, the pope himself and his cardinals” fell under the diabolical influence because they were not “cleansed or clean” as the magicians who “work truely in this art.” The narrative of *Liber Juratus* also exemplify clearly that, at least since the XIII century, the magi had already a clear awareness of their war and they knew the importance of books to win it:

When wicked spirits were gathered together, intending to send devils into the hearts of men, to the intent they would destroy all things profitable for mankind, and to corrupt all the whole world, even to the uttermost of their power, sowing hypocrise and envy, and rooting bishops and prelates in pride, even the pope himself and his cardinals, which gathering themselves together said one to another as here follows:

*The health which the Lord has given his people is now through magic and negromancy turned into the damnation of all people. For even the magians themselves, being intoxicated and blinded by the devil, and contrary to the order of Christ's Church, and transgressing the commandment of God, which says, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God, but him only shalt thou serve." But these negromancers or magians, denying the sacrifice due to God, and in tempting him have done sacrifice to devils, and abused His Name in calling of them, contrary to the profession made at there baptism, for there it is said, "Forsake the devil*

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<sup>46</sup> *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, edited by Hans Dieter Berz. The University of Chicago Press (1992).

*and all his pomps." But these magians and negromancers do not follow only the pomps and works of Satan, but have also brought all people through their marvellous illusions into the errors, drawing the ignorant and such like into the damnation both of soul and body, and they thinking this for no other purpose but that by this they should destroy all other sciences.*

It is thought meet therefore to pluck up and utterly to destroy this deadly root, and all the followers of this art, but they through the instigation of the devil, and being moved with envy and covetousness under the similitude of truth, they did publish and spread abroad the falsehood, speaking false and unlikely things. For it is not possible that a wicked and unclean man should work truely in this art, for men are not bound to spirits, but the spirits are constrained against their wills to answer men that are cleansed or clean, and to fulfill their requests. Yet against all those wills we have gone about to set forth the principles of this art, and the cause of truth, and for that cause thay had condemned this art and judged us to death.

We therefore, through God's sufferance, having a foreknowledge of that judgement, knowing also that by it should follow much mischief, and that it was impossible to us to escape the hands of the people by our own strength without the help of spirits, fearing that a greater danger would follow upon it, for the wicked power of the spirits at our command could have destroyed them who condemned us all utterly in an hour.

Wherefore, we called a general council of all the masters. And out of the which council of 811 masters which came out of Naples, Athens, and Toledo, we did choose one whose name was Honorius, the son of Euclid, master of the Thebians, in the which city this art was read, that he should work for us in this said art. And he through the council of a certain angel whose name was Hocroel, did write seven volumes of art magic, giving to us the kernel, and to others the shells. Out of the which books he drew out 93 chapters, in the which is briefly contained the effect of this art, of the which chapters he made a book which we do call *The Sacred or Sworn Book* for this cause, for in it is contained the 100 sacred names of God, and therefore it is called sacred, as you would say "made of holy things," or else because by this book he came to the knowledge of sacred or holy things, or else because it was consecrated by angels, or else because the angel Hocroel did declare and show him that it was consecrated of God.<sup>47</sup>

Two things then happened in the transition from the XVII and XIX centuries which affected the war of magic or, as Owen Davies put it, the war against it.<sup>48</sup> First, the course of the now contested "scientific revolution" discarded natural magic, as its principal premises were found to be false, and it also simply ignored ceremonial magic as it never was able to provide verifiable proof of the validity of its claims. On the other hand, the period saw the rise of the print and the discovery of the market for magic, and

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.esotericarchives.com/juratus/juratus.htm>

<sup>48</sup> *Grimoires, A History of Magic Books*, Owen Davies. Oxford University Press (2009).



its emergence was directly connected to the Reformation, which also depended heavily on the print.

The first wave of print grimoires emanated from Protestant German and Swiss publishing centers such as Frankfurt and Basel. The long arms and beady eyes of the papal censors did not reach these Protestant areas. The notoriety of the Germanic mages, Trithemius, Faust, Agrippa, and Paracelsus, would have also generated a keen regional audience. But such occult works were not only of interest to practical magicians and the simply curious. A strong mystical, spiritual tradition emerged in Protestantism during the sixteenth century, most notably expressed in the influential writings of the Lutheran visionary Jacob Boehme, but also evident in numerous other small Protestant sects, such as those that made their way to America during the late seventeenth century. The Neoplatonic discourses on the angelic and spiritual hierarchies contained in the *Arbatel*, *Heptameron*, *Book Three* and *Fourth Book of Occult Philosophy*, and the *Steganographia*, and the keys they provided to direct celestial communication, appealed to the prophetic and revelatory aspects of Protestant theology.<sup>49</sup>

The books of magic assume a very important role in Western culture because of the lack of a chain of direct knowledge transmission, a lack due to the violent campaign of censure instigated by the Church. (I am a personal witness to this, as my learning and practice came from the books.) The persecution moved by the Church, of course, was inherited from Antiquity and had its roots in the Roman legislation and in the persecution against pagans recorded in the Old Testament.

Although religious reasons played an important role in the war against magic, we must realize that the fear of the magician is as ancient and archetypical as magic itself. Hence here in Angola (where I spend most of the year working since 1999) for instance, from time to time I hear from people who stoned or lynched some “quimbanda” or cunning-man believing them guilty of some magical misdeed. In other parts of Africa we still find the belief in the witch-children which is responsible for the torture, killing and expulsion from home of children believed to have magical powers. In Brazil, my country of birth, the Pentecostal churches profit greatly from the fear of magic, presenting themselves as a defense against the African traditions where magical practices are very strong.

### *The Law of the Magus*

After all we saw thus far, it does not come as a surprise that the legend of the promulgation of the Law of Thelema begins with an invocation of Toth.

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<sup>49</sup> *Grimoires, A History of Magic Books*, Owen Davies. Oxford University Press (2009).

On the 17 of March of 1904, after a failed attempt at invoking the sylphs made at the previous day, it is recorded that Aleister Crowley invoked Toth “with great success.”<sup>50</sup> It was the beginning of an amazing magical adventure which would conclude with the reception of the Book of the Law during the 8, 9 and 10 of April.

The central message of the magical-philosophical (some would say religious) system known as Thelema, which comes in part from the Book of the Law, and in part from the magical training Crowley received in the Golden Dawn, is clearly of a reformist character, a radical reformism in which all the former religions are expected to be abolished. It also proposes a religious method in the same lines proposed by Luther and other reformists, by which each individual should approach the central standards of Thelema at the core of the Book of the Law by its own efforts, resorting to its own intellect. Even more, it expected from the true follower a directed effort towards the discovery and realization of his personal will, a task that would seem to require some level of inner experience going beyond the mere intellectual awareness.

The main message, as it issued during the Reformation from the mouth of Zwingli and Calvin, was that men should not put their faith in any external institution, the Church, or in any religious system as embodying the divine. Instead *religio* designated something personal, inner and transcendently oriented.<sup>51</sup>

We are here treading very familiar Hermetic grounds. Aiwass, the entity dictating the secrets of the new aeon to his scribe Crowley, seems to be reenacting the role of Pimander in this revelation. Crowley’s magical training and studies, of course, were immersed in Hermetic lore and his system of attainment, itself a reformation of the system of initiations of the Golden Dawn, was based in key concepts inherited from the Kabbalistic-Hermetic mages of the Renaissance. This inheritance came to him through both the content of the initiatory magic of the Golden Dawn as through his personal studies. The long magical path towards deification of man and the consequent bestowal of powers to change the world were defined during the Renaissance not by appeal to Hermetic doctrines only, but also by the adoption of the ideas received from the Kabbalah. Lurianic kabbalah in XVI century developed the doctrine that the elevated sage could help bring the Messianic age by the realization of religious acts, a point of view which married perfectly with the Hermetic ideas, to a point it is in fact very difficult to ascertain if the Renaissance and Reformation ideas about the power and function of magic own more to the Hermetism or to the Kabbalah. By the time Agrippa finished the final version of his work, both doctrines were already completely mingled. Giordano Bruno, a reader of Agrippa as we mentioned before<sup>52</sup>, drew extensively on the

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<sup>50</sup> *The Equinox of the Gods*, Aleister Crowley. New Falcon Publications (1991).

<sup>51</sup> *Magic, science, religion, and the scope of rationality*, Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah. Cambridge University Press (1990).

<sup>52</sup> *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance*, Paola Zambelli. Brill (2007).

Kabbalistic system of the sefirot in his descriptions of the path to illumination,<sup>53</sup> and the entire system used later by Crowley depended on the degrees of initiation based in the sefirot developed by the Golden Dawn. Christopher Leirich, in his seminal study on the *De occulta philophia*,<sup>54</sup> highlighted the importance of the adoption of the Kabbalah in the magical theory advanced by Agrippa:

For our purposes, then, we can say that Kabbalah has a speculative cosmological (theosophical) component, focused on the nature of the divine, commonly expressed in terms of the sefirot or emanations. Next, there is an ecstatic, mystical component, whose focus is on unity with the Godhead and the means of its achievement. Under these two general headings are sometimes found exteriorizing, “magical” practices. In some cases, these magical techniques are intended to draw down power from the sefirot, and may be understood as a kind of practical application of theosophical doctrines. In other cases, the magical techniques are more closely related to ecstatic techniques, and are intended to elevate the practitioner toward the Godhead, the main distinction between the magical and the ecstatic here being the magician’s intent to deploy divine forces in the world subsequent to his elevation above it.<sup>55</sup>

Let us recall Moshe Idel’s description of two explanatory models for Kabbalistic magic: on the one hand, the magician may work more or less ecstatically, the practical effect of his techniques being elevation of the soul towards the divine nature; on the other, magical techniques may be employed to draw down power from the sefirot. Given our analysis of De Occulta Philosophy in general, it seems clear that both forms are present here: the use of magical techniques to achieve mystical ends is formulated quite explicitly, but the discussion of angelic hierarchies implies that the same techniques may draw down power.<sup>56</sup>

In sum, De Occulta Philosophy’s ceremonial magic has two linked functions. First, the techniques assist the soul’s cleaving to God, purifying and elevating the magician toward the divine. Second, through such elevation, the magician gains power over the angels and ministering forces, and can manipulate them to produce worldly effects. The higher the magician rises through the spheres and the divine world, the more powerful the angels which can be thus manipulated; furthermore (as we shall see) such manipulation binds the magician to the superior nature of

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<sup>53</sup> *Giordano Bruno and the Kabbalah: Prophets, Magicians, and Rabbis*, Karen Silvia de Leon-Jones. Bison Books (2004).

<sup>54</sup> *The Language of Demons and Angels, Cornelius Agrippa’s Occult Philosophy*, Christopher Leirich. Brill (2003).

<sup>55</sup> *The Language of Demons and Angels, Cornelius Agrippa’s Occult Philosophy*, Christopher Leirich. Brill (2003).

<sup>56</sup> *The Language of Demons and Angels, Cornelius Agrippa’s Occult Philosophy*, Christopher Leirich. Brill (2003).

the angels, aiding further ascent. By linking these two functions, De Occulta Philosophy consecrates magic: no magician can control spirits whose status is higher than his own, therefore the manipulation of angels is both proof of purity and an instrument for achieving divine union. The radical promise of ceremonial magic is fulfilled: demonic magic leads the soul to God.<sup>57</sup>

We can see that the whole rationale is in perfect agreement with the apology we found in the preface of the *Sworn Book of Honorius*: magic own intrinsic characteristics and methods, requiring purification and spiritual elevation, are its main witness against the attacks of its enemies.

Crowley followed the same rationale in his essay *The Revival of Magic*, so making clear his adoption of the Renaissance view of magic; this excerpt is very illustrative, as he also seems to endorse the Renaissance opposition to a “lower” type of magic, and repeat the claim we found in the *Sworn Book of Honorius* about the radical antagonism between magic and evil:

I must again call attention to the necessity of this formula of identification in order to show the impossibility of evil in magick. Evil is synonymous with failure. With the low class sorcerer who sells himself as a slave to some “devil” we have nothing here to do. That is the antithesis of magick. The aim is to command the spirits. Very well; suppose we begin in a gross, selfish, avaricious way, and try to get spirits to bring us gold. We call Hismael, the spirit of Jupiter. Nothing happens. We learn that Hismael will not be commanded but by his proper Intelligence, Iophiel, who is only amenable to the orders of Sachiel, his Angel. Same story with Sachiel. We go to Tzadquiël the Archangel. Still no good; for Tzadquiël obeys none but El. Good, we invoke El, the God. We must then become El; and having done so, having entered into that vast divine essence, we cannot bother any more as to whether we have any money. We have left all that behind. So then we see that to perform any miracle, we must show a divine reason for it.<sup>58</sup>

Crowley also followed in the steps of the Renaissance magi when he developed his key concept of the *magus* and his work. He took the title given by the Golden Dawn to the initiatory grade corresponding to Hokmah, which was originally an administrative title in the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia, and refashioned it completely. Crowley redefined the magus as being someone who, achieving that evolutionary degree after ‘crossing the abyss’ (which is to be found below Hokmah), returns to the world with a new message or a new law, founding a new religion. This is clearly again the Renaissance and Reformation ideal of prophecy achieved through magic and ushering a

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<sup>57</sup> *The Language of Demons and Angels, Cornelius Agrippa's Occult Philosophy*, Christopher Leirich. Brill (2003).

<sup>58</sup> *The Revival of Magick and other Essays*, Aleister Crowley. New Falcon (1998).

new age. Crowley also presented a lineage of the previous magi to which he added his own name after the reception of the Book of the Law: Lao-tze, Gautama, Krishna, Dionysius, Tahuti (Toth), Mosheh and Mohammed.

Now, o my son, the Incarnation of a Poet is particular and not Universal; he sayeth indeed true Things, but not the Things of All-Truth. And that these may be said it is necessary that One take human Flesh, and become a Magus in Our Holy Order. He then is called the Logos, or *Logos Aionos*, that is to say, the Word of the Æon or Age, because He is verily That Word.<sup>59</sup>

And this is also a Renaissance strategy to achieve legitimation; both Ficino and Bruno used lineages of magi to reinforce the status of magic. Ficino *prisca theologia* followed from Mercury (“who was called Theut by the Egyptians and Trismegistus by the Greeks”<sup>60</sup>) to Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, Philolaus and Plato<sup>61</sup>. Bruno’s genealogy of *prisca magia* used more generic names as the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Magi, the Gymnosophists and the Orphics, but sometimes honored more modern names like Albertus Magnus, Nicholas de Cusa and Copernicus.<sup>62</sup>

### *The Magical Utopia*

In the year of 1920 Aleister Crowley retired to the island of Sicily with a small group of followers. There they create the Abbey of Thelema, inspired in the writings of the Renaissance humanist François Rabelais. The debt of Thelema to Rabelais’ work is much known, and it was celebrated by Crowley himself:

Far more important is the Word of Rabelais, *Fais ce que veux*. The sublime Doctor does indeed intend, so far as he goes, to set forth in essence the Law of Thelema, very much as it is understood by the Master Therion himself. The implications of the context are significant. Our Master makes the foundations of the Abbey of Thelema the quite definitive climax of his story of Gargantua; he describes his ideal of society. Thus he was certainly occupied with the idea of a new Aeon, and he saw, albeit perhaps dimly, that *Fais ce que veux* was the required Magical Formula. The Cardinal Jean du Bellay, indeed, reported to Francis I that *Gargantua* was a “new Gospel.” It was in fact, the Book that

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<sup>59</sup> *Liber Aleph vel CXI, The Book of Wisdom and Folly*, Aleister Crowley. Weiser (1992).

<sup>60</sup> *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus, Hermetism from Ancient to Modern Times*, Florian Ebeling. Cornell University Press (2005).

<sup>61</sup> Ficino wrote variants of the list, sometimes adding Zoroaster before Hermes. See *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Frances A. Yates. Routledge and Kegan Paul (1964).

<sup>62</sup> *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Frances A. Yates. Routledge and Kegan Paul (1964).

the Renaissance lacked; and had it been taken as it should have been, the world might have been spared the ignominy of Protestantism.<sup>63</sup>

Rabelais in his original creation of the *Abbaye de Thélème* was developing over a concept very dear to the philosophers of the Renaissance, the possibility of creating a utopia. Utopic literature is a genre with its roots in the *Republic* of Plato and which became very popular during the Renaissance and Reformation years. The most known utopias were the one described by Thomas More, the *New Atlantis* by Francis Bacon and the *City of the Sun* by Tommaso Campanella. With Campanella we are again on the familiar ground treaded by the Renaissance magus:

Tommaso Campanella, an early modern thinker possessed by a vision of the total restoration of society and morals, of the return of mankind to a state of innocence before Adam's fall and of Astrology, himself as the prophet destined to usher in this coming transformation.<sup>64</sup>

And, as it would be to be expected, Campanella's view on prophecy was also related to magic:

Beneath its profession of extreme naturalism, his philosophy presents certain ambiguities. For example, the natural foundation of his epistemology had to legitimize a higher level from which, in turn, he had to draw the conditions of its intelligibility. Thus, in his *Città del Sole* (1602) he declared that Christianity had only added the sacraments to the natural law, where it was destined by its higher rationality to impose itself. So the superiority of the senses to the intellect was valid both at an inferior level – that of the perception of perceptible reality – and also at the higher level of the perception of future events by superior inspiration, a perception which was called upon to constitute the level of revelation. Prophecy, thus promoted to the rank of *scientia experimentalis*, could therefore be considered as the highest form of *gratia gratis data*, by which the divinity guided and provided for man, and also as the highest form of magic, namely divine magic.<sup>65</sup>

#### *Afterword: The Fate of the Magicians*

It is instructive to see how ended the personal ambitions and the lofty ideals for which the magi from the Renaissance until Crowley's years fought and die.

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<sup>63</sup> *The Antecedents of Thelema*. In *The Revival of Magick*, Aleister Crowley. New Falcon (1998).

<sup>64</sup> *Astrology, Ritual and Revolution in the Works of Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639)*, Peter J. Forshaw. Available at the Academia.edu site.

<sup>65</sup> *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, edited by Charles B. Smith and Quentin Skinner. Cambridge University Press (1992).

Giovanni ‘Mercurio’ da Corregio had an eventful life. He was imprisoned a number of times, as it would be expected. He escaped from prison in Rome with the aid of friends and followers, although it is not certain if that happened in 1484; he tried to prophesize other times there. He was arrested on the suspicion of heresy in Bologna, where he had wife and children. He was set free, probably due for the influence of his family, but again fell in the hands of the Inquisition when passing through Florence. This time things got ugly when he was delivered in the hands of the Franciscan Inquisitor:

And it seems that this Inquisitor used great rigor against the said Messer Giovanni, making all people come and see him in shackles, sneering at him as if he were an animal, threatening all the time to have him burned. Thence the said Messer Giovanni fell into despair and threw his head against the stock, tearing all the flesh off his head with his hands, wherefore it is doubted he will die. And when he did not die, it is feared that things would take a bad ending for him anyway (Letter from Aldovrandino Guidoni to the Duke Ercole d’Este).<sup>66</sup>

Things did not have a bad end, as the influence of his disciple Lazarelli in the court of Naples was good enough to have the King Ferrante asking for his release. The following years saw Giovanni still peregrinating through the Italian cities, now followed by his miserable family, whom he had wearing sackcloth and chains around the neck. Not that they were really pauper: Giovanni always kept servants, published his books and was found of giving expensive symbolic gifts to important people. He ended in the court of the French King Louis XII, where apparently was kept as a curiosity. He maintained his messianic claims, but became also known for his impressive knowledge of medicine, alchemy and natural magic. It is not known how he died and the fate of his family, but this lack of information suppose a peaceful end.

Marsilio Ficino, from the list of magi we are mentioned, is the one who lived most pacifically. He enjoyed the protection and patronage of the powerful Cosimo de Medici, who made Ficino the head of his new founded Platonic Academy. Ficino was very influential during his lifetime, being in contact and being highly respected by most of the European intellectuals of the age. His translations of Plato, Plotinus and of the Hermetic writings remained influential during the entire Renaissance. He practiced a therapeutic kind of magic, much influenced by concepts of Astrology. He became a priest at 40 years old, and lived peacefully until the age of 66.

Agrippa travelled extensively through Europe, and attended several positions in the courts, governments and study institutions. His career was marked by small skirmishes with orthodox minded representatives of Church and State, but none with perilous results. He was also successful in the defense of a peasant woman accused of witchcraft by Dominican inquisitors. During all his life he maintained a net of

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<sup>66</sup> *Lodovico Lazzarelli, The Hermetic Writings and Related Documents*, Hanegraaff and Bouthoorn. Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies (2005).

correspondents who shared similar interests in the occult. After a short imprisonment in the end of his life, he died peacefully. His work on the occult philosophy would become extremely influent in the coming years and is to the day a cornerstone of Western magic.

John Dee's opus is the greatest achievement of Renaissance magic, an ensemble of angelic revelations, prophetic utterances and magical teachings direct connect with the ushering of a new age. Dee was acclaimed and respect in Europe as a scholar, enjoyed the protection of Queen Elizabeth I and was received by the Emperor Rudolph II in the court of Prague several times. Faithful to the prophetic responsibilities he believed to have received through his magic, he tried in vain to convince the Emperor of the importance of his angelic communications. At the age of 62 he returned to England, to find his famous library in ruins with many books missing. Elizabeth I still protected him until her death in 1603, but the rise of James I could not be advantageous for him, as the new monarch was suspicious of anything related to magic. He died at the age of 82, but the reports that he died in poverty are doubtful. A magician to the end, the last record of his angelic invocations dates from 1607, two years before his death.

Tommaso Campanella first arrest and confinement under the suspicious of heresy happened in 1594 when he was 26 years old, and lasted for three years. He was again incarcerated in 1599 for being the spiritual inspiration in a conspiracy to free the kingdom of Naples from the Spanish influence. He was tried for rebellion and also for heresy, as his participation in the plot was founded in astrological previsions and prophecies. He was tortured on the rack seven times, and had to put fire in his cell feigning madness to escape the death sentence. The tortures he suffered however were extremely severe:

In a passage of the *Medicina*, he would later recall the prison doctor (*vir bonus* – ‘a good man’) with sober gratitude, for being able, against all hope, to make him well. Presented with a case of bruising ‘deep ... and measureless,’ he found a way to separate the healthy from the damaged flesh, rendering the damaged parts completely rotten so as to be able to remove them, all to the end of avoiding an infection and permitting the reconstitution of the flesh, and also so as to restore the two pounds Campanella had lost.<sup>67</sup>

During the next twenty-seven years he spent in prison, he wrote many important works, between them the description of the utopic City of the Sun. He was released in 1626 by the pope Urban VIII, whom he served as an astrologer advisor for five years. He had to flee to France however, due to a new conspiracy led by one of his former followers. He was received and honored at the court of Louis XIII and protected by Cardinal Richelieu, and spent his final day in a convent in Paris, provided for by a king pension.

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<sup>67</sup> Tommaso CaMPanella: *The Book and the Body of Nature*, Germana ernst. Università di Roma Tre (2010).



Paracelsus died at the age of 47, after have made several important contributions in the history of medicine. His name was mentioned in the Rosicrucian manifesto *Fama Fraternitatis* and his work also achieved a lasting influence in the European magic. He was especially apt in the creation of astrological talismans in medicine and created the Alphabet of the Magi for engraving angelical names. He also travelled extensively in Europe, but he had a difficult personality and entered in conflict too often. He had to flee from Basel where he held a chair at the university and wandered for years as a tramp. His book were forbidden of going into print and only in 1536, with 43 years old, he managed to publish a work on surgery which regained him some good fame. He would die four years later. We can have an idea of the origins of his troubles from the following excerpt:

I am Theophrastus, and greater than those to whom you liken me; I am Theophrastus, and in addition I am *monarcha medicorum* and I can prove to you what you cannot prove. I need not don a coat of mail or a buckler against you, for you are not learned or experienced enough to refute even a word of mine. As for you, you can defend your kingdom with belly-crawling and flattery. How long do you think this will last? Let me tell you this: every little hair on my neck knows more than you and all your scribes, and my shoe buckles are more learned than your Galen and Avicenna, and my beard has more experience than all your high colleges.<sup>68</sup>

The fiery demise of Giordano Bruno is universally known. Bruno also had a difficult personality and found himself in constant trouble and conflict, being also accused of being arrogant. From the introduction of his philosophical dialogue *The Ash Wednesday Supper*<sup>69</sup> we have this self-description which enables us to better judge on that:

In medicine expert, in contemplation judicious, in divination without equal, in magic miraculous, in superstitions provident, in laws observant, in morals irreproachable, in theology divine, in all effects, heroic.

Bruno's later biographer Dorothea Waley Singer<sup>70</sup> concluded that this was one of many tries Bruno did aiming at generating authority, that largely failed due to him being "unsuccessful in human relations, devoid of social tact or worldly wisdom, unpractical to an almost insane degree." Bruno's declaration and Singer's evaluation when put together makes a very close parallel to the description Aleister Crowley gave about himself, in part written in the third person:

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<sup>68</sup> *Paracelsus, Selected Writings*, edited by Jolande Jacobi. Pantheon ( 1951).

<sup>69</sup> *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, Giordano Bruno. University of Toronto Press (1995).

<sup>70</sup> *Giordano Bruno: His Life and Thought*, Dorothea Waley Singer. Schuman (1950).

I, of all men on this Earth reputed mightiest in Magick, by mine enemies more than by my friends.<sup>71</sup>

This account has been deemed necessary to explain how it is that a man of such unimaginably commanding qualities as to have made him world-famous in so many diverse spheres of action, should have been so grotesquely unable to make use of his faculties, or even of his achievements, in any of the ordinary channels of human activity; to consolidate his personal pre-eminence, or even to secure his position from a social or economic standpoint.<sup>72</sup>

Crowley in many aspects represents a new apex for the aspirations of the Renaissance and Reformation views of magic. Although his utopic try at Cefalu came to a tragic end, he nevertheless succeeded in creating a religious-philosophical system based on a prophetic experience provided by a series of magical practices. He followed on the steps of the Golden Dawn's main creator, MacGregor Mathers, who managed to bring together the two magical perspectives inherited from the Renaissance times: the Hermetic-Kabbalistic view of magic as being an initiatory path, proposed by the Renaissance magi, and the daemonological invocations of the grimoires they despised. Mathers helped to formulate the degrees and initiations of the Golden Dawn based upon the system of the sefirot, and designed to each degree instructions and practices in accordance with Hermetic principles; and at the same time he dedicated himself to translate and publish grimoires like the *Ars Goetia* section of the *Lemegeton*, the *Key of Solomon*, the *Arbatel* and the *Book of Abramelin*. Crowley's prophetic achievement combined both currents, as his performance of the magical operation found in the book of Abramelin, which aims at contacting the Guardian Angel and submitting the demons of the world, became the key to receive the revelation of the *Book of the Law* through the spirit Aiwass.

We may frown at the personal shortcomings of many of the magicians listed in these lines, but we should not lose sight of the reason each of them achieved greatness in history: they all went beyond their individualistic interests of achieving illumination and welfare through magic just for themselves, and made their best efforts to use it to change the world for better for everyone.

I believe the great war of magic to be an ongoing business. Currents of Christian and Islamic fundamentalisms still threaten the liberty of the individual, and Christian politicians have been trying for the past decades to use the democratic system to achieve power and regulate the lives of everyone according to their prejudices. Of course magic cannot prosper in such environments. I believe magicians of our age should focus their ceremonies to have influence at key situations, like oppressive governments, fraudulent and abusive religious institutions and anti-ecological

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<sup>71</sup> *The Equinox of the Gods*, Aleister Crowley. New Falcon Publications (1991).

<sup>72</sup> *The Equinox of the Gods*, Aleister Crowley. New Falcon Publications (1991).

corporations. On the other hand, there are lots of individuals and groups which strive to make the world a better place that should be supported by magical means.

Although at the moment we find ourselves in a good moment for magic, with widespread publications, a worldwide net of students and practitioners, and the recognition of the academy on the importance of the history of magic, we must be aware that it needs just an unhappy sequence of bad elections to turn a democracy into a retrograde religious rule where the impostor and the hypocrite will ascend. On a possible situation like this, the magicians of the age will find themselves once again, not merely fighting for a better world, but fighting for their lives.